

**What Is Claimed Is:**

1           1.       A method that facilitates sharing authentication information  
2       between a plurality of servers within a distributed computing system, wherein the  
3       plurality of servers includes a first server and an authentication server, the method  
4       comprising:  
5           receiving a communication from a client at the first server;  
6           determining whether the client is known to the first server; and  
7           if the client is unknown to the first server,  
8                       generating a first identifier for the client,  
9                       communicating the first identifier to the client, and  
10                      directing the client to communicate the first identifier to the  
11           authentication server, so that the authentication server can attempt  
12           to associate the first identifier with a known client.

1           2.       The method of claim 1,  
2       wherein if the client is known to the authentication server, the  
3       authentication server associates the first identifier with a pre-existing identifier for  
4       the client;  
5       wherein if the client is unknown to the authentication server, the  
6       authentication server causes the client to store a cookie for the authentication  
7       server, wherein the cookie contains an identifier for the client, so that the  
8       authentication server can subsequently identify the client by examining the cookie.

1           3.       The method of claim 1, wherein the authentication server  
2       determines whether or not the client is known to the authentication server by

3 attempting to examine a cookie presented by the client to the authentication  
4 server.

1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein if the client is unknown to the first  
2 server, the method additionally comprises causing the client to store a cookie for  
3 the first server, so that the client can subsequently present the cookie to the first  
4 server in order to identify the client to the first server.

1 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2 receiving a username and a password from the client;  
3 attempting to authenticate the client based on the username and the  
4 password; and  
5 if the client authenticates, associating the username with the client.

1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether the client is  
2 known to the first server involves:  
3 looking for a cookie presented by the client to the first server; and  
4 if such a cookie is presented by the client, determining if the cookie  
5 contains an identifier that is known to the first server.

1 7. A method that facilitates sharing authentication information  
2 between a plurality of servers within a distributed computing system, wherein the  
3 plurality of servers includes a first server and an authentication server, the method  
4 comprising:  
5 receiving a communication from a client at the authentication server,  
6 wherein the communication includes a first identifier generated by the first server  
7 for the client;

8 determining whether the client is known to the authentication server;  
9 if the client is known to the authentication server, associating the first  
10 identifier with a pre-existing identifier for the client; and  
11 if the client is unknown to the authentication server, causing the client to  
12 store a cookie for the authentication server, wherein the cookie contains an  
13 identifier for the client, so that the authentication server can subsequently identify  
14 the client by examining the cookie.

1 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the authentication server  
2 determines whether or not the client is known to the authentication server by  
3 attempting to examine a cookie presented by the client to the authentication  
4 server.

1 9. The method of claim 7, further comprising:  
2 receiving a username and a password from the client;  
3 attempting to authenticate the client based on the username and the  
4 password; and  
5 if the client authenticates, associating the username with the client.

1 10. A computer-readable storage medium storing instructions that  
2 when executed by a computer cause the computer to perform a method that  
3 facilitates sharing authentication information between a plurality of servers within  
4 a distributed computing system, wherein the plurality of servers includes a first  
5 server and an authentication server, the method comprising:  
6 receiving a communication from a client at the first server;  
7 determining whether the client is known to the first server; and  
8 if the client is unknown to the first server,

9 generating a first identifier for the client,  
10 communicating the first identifier to the client, and  
11 directing the client to communicate the first identifier to the  
12 authentication server, so that the authentication server can attempt  
13 to associate the first identifier with a known client.

1 11. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 10,  
2 wherein if the client is known to the authentication server, the  
3 authentication server associates the first identifier with a pre-existing identifier for  
4 the client;  
5 wherein if the client is unknown to the authentication server, the  
6 authentication server causes the client to store a cookie for the authentication  
7 server, wherein the cookie contains an identifier for the client, so that the  
8 authentication server can subsequently identify the client by examining the cookie.

1 12. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 10, wherein the  
2 authentication server determines whether or not the client is known to the  
3 authentication server by attempting to examine a cookie presented by the client to  
4 the authentication server.

1 13. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 10, wherein if the  
2 client is unknown to the first server, the method additionally comprises causing  
3 the client to store a cookie for the first server, so that the client can subsequently  
4 present the cookie to the first server in order to identify the client to the first  
5 server.

1           14.     The computer-readable storage medium of claim 10, wherein the  
2 method further comprises:  
3           receiving a username and a password from the client;  
4           attempting to authenticate the client based on the username and the  
5 password; and  
6           if the client authenticates, associating the username with the client.

1           15.     The computer-readable storage medium of claim 10, wherein  
2 determining whether the client is known to the first server involves:  
3           looking for a cookie presented by the client to the first server; and  
4           if such a cookie is presented by the client, determining if the cookie  
5 contains an identifier that is known to the first server.

1           16.     A computer-readable storage medium storing instructions that  
2 when executed by a computer cause the computer to perform a method that  
3 facilitates sharing authentication information between a plurality of servers within  
4 a distributed computing system, wherein the plurality of servers includes a first  
5 server and an authentication server, the method comprising:  
6           receiving a communication from a client at the authentication server,  
7 wherein the communication includes a first identifier generated by the first server  
8 for the client;  
9           determining whether the client is known to the authentication server;  
10          if the client is known to the authentication server, associating the first  
11 identifier with a pre-existing identifier for the client; and  
12          if the client is unknown to the authentication server, causing the client to  
13 store a cookie for the authentication server, wherein the cookie contains an

14 identifier for the client, so that the authentication server can subsequently identify  
15 the client by examining the cookie.

1 17. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 16, wherein the  
2 authentication server determines whether or not the client is known to the  
3 authentication server by attempting to examine a cookie presented by the client to  
4 the authentication server.

1 18. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 16, wherein the  
2 method further comprises:  
3 receiving a username and a password from the client at the first server;  
4 attempting to authenticate the client based on the username and the  
5 password; and  
6 if the client authenticates, associating the username with the client.

1 19. An apparatus that facilitates sharing authentication information  
2 between a plurality of servers within a distributed computing system, the  
3 apparatus comprising:  
4 a first server within the plurality of servers;  
5 a receiving mechanism within the first server that is configured to receive  
6 a communication from a client; and  
7 an identification mechanism within the first server that is configured to  
8 determine whether the client is known to the first server;  
9 wherein if the client is unknown to the first server, the identification  
10 mechanism is configured to,  
11 generate a first identifier for the client,  
12 communicate the first identifier to the client, and to

13 direct the client to communicate the first identifier to the  
14 authentication server, so that the authentication server can attempt  
15 to associate the first identifier with a known client.

1 20. The apparatus of claim 19, further comprising  
2 an authentication server within the plurality of servers;  
3 an association mechanism within the authentication server;  
4 wherein if the client is known to the authentication server, the association  
5 mechanism is configured to associate the first identifier with a pre-existing  
6 identifier for the client;  
7 wherein if the client is unknown to the authentication server, the  
8 association mechanism is configured to cause the client to store a cookie for the  
9 authentication server, wherein the cookie contains an identifier for the client, so  
10 that the authentication server can subsequently identify the client by examining  
11 the cookie.

1 21. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the authentication server  
2 additionally includes an identification mechanism that is configured to determine  
3 whether or not the client is known to the authentication server by attempting to  
4 examine a cookie presented by the client to the authentication server.

1 22. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein if the client is unknown to the  
2 first server, the identification mechanism is additionally configured to cause the  
3 client to store a cookie for the first server, so that the client can subsequently  
4 present the cookie to the first server in order to identify the client to the first  
5 server.

1           23.     The apparatus of claim 19, further comprising an authentication  
2 mechanism that is configured to:  
3           receive a username and a password from the client;  
4           attempt to authenticate the client based on the username and the password;  
5 and to  
6           associate the username with the client if the client authenticates.

1           24.     The apparatus of claim 19, wherein the identification mechanism is  
2 configured to:  
3           look for a cookie presented by the client to the first server; and  
4           if such a cookie is presented by the client, to determine if the cookie  
5 contains an identifier that is known to the first server.

1           25.     An apparatus that facilitates sharing authentication information  
2 between a plurality of servers within a distributed computing system, the  
3 apparatus comprising:  
4           an authentication server within the plurality of servers;  
5           a receiving mechanism within the authentication server that is configured  
6 to receive a communication from a client, wherein the communication includes a  
7 first identifier generated by a first server within the plurality of servers for the  
8 client;  
9           an identification mechanism within the authentication server that is  
10 configured to determine whether the client is known to the authentication server;  
11 and  
12           an association mechanism within the authentication server;



13 wherein if the client is known to the authentication server, the association  
14 mechanism is configured to associate the first identifier with a pre-existing  
15 identifier for the client;

16 wherein if the client is unknown to the authentication server, the  
17 association mechanism is configured to cause the client to store a cookie for the  
18 authentication server, wherein the cookie contains an identifier for the client, so  
19 that the authentication server can subsequently identify the client by examining  
20 the cookie.

1 26. The apparatus of claim 25, wherein the identification mechanism is  
2 configured to determine whether or not the client is known to the authentication  
3 server by attempting to examine a cookie presented by the client to the  
4 authentication server.

1 27. The apparatus of claim 25, further comprising an authentication  
2 mechanism that is configured to:  
3 receive a username and a password from the client;  
4 attempt to authenticate the client based on the username and the password;  
5 and to  
6 associate the username with the client if the client authenticates.